5-13-61

THERE IS NOTHING QUITE SO WONDROUS AS A SEED/ WHEN WE OPENTHE PACKET AND SEE THE TINY LITTLE THINGS, WHEN WE TAKE 50 OF THEM BETWEEN OUR THUMB AND FINGER TO PLACE THEM IN THE GROUND WE CANNOT HELP BUT SHAKE OUR HEADS IN WONDER. FROM THIS INSIGNIFICANT LITTLE PIECE OF ORGANIC MATTER WILL COME A RADISH, OR A CARROT,/ IT IS TRULY AMAZING.

P.

HOME BAKED BREAD IS RAPIDLY BECOMING A THING OF THE PAST, BUT WE STILL REMEMBER FONDLY THE WONDER OF THE DOUGH RAISING AND EXPANDING, ALMOST MAGICALLY.

IN A SEED AND THE LEAVENING IN BREAD WE SEE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SMALL: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HIDDEN. ON A LARGER SCALE IT IS THE STORY OF LIFE AND IN OUR SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING WE SEE THAT JESUS INTENDED THIS LESSON TO APPLY TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

THE TWO PARABLES GO TOGETHER, THEY ILLUSTRATE THE SAME POINT. IN PARTICULAR THE STORY OF THE MUSTARD SEED HAS BECOME POPUULR DUE TO THE APPEARANCE OF SMALL BRACELETS AND PINS CONTAINING THE LITTLE SEED. MUSTARD WAS CULTIVATED IN JESUS' DAY FOR BOTH ITS VEGETABLE AND ITS SEED. BECAUSE OF ITS SMALLNESS THE MUSTARD SEED BECAME THE POPULAR IDIOM FOR ANYTHING DIMINUTIVE IN SIZE./ JUST AS WE SAY, ("SHE'S JUST AS BIG AS A MINUTE")/THE ANCIENTS WOULD SAY SOMETHING LIKE ("HY SHE'S NO BIGGER THAN A MUSTARD SEED.") IN THE CASE OF LEAVEN--BREAD WAS BAKED DAILY BY THE PALESTINIAN HOUSEWIFE SOMETIMES WITHOUT LEAVEN BUT MOSTLY WITH IT.

AND SO WHEN JESUS USED THESE PARABLES HE WAS SURE THAT THEY WOULD BE UNDERSTOOD. EVERYONE KNEW HOW LITTLE AND INSIGNIFICANT THE SEED OF THE MUSTARD TREE WAS, AND THEY ALSO KNEW HOW IT GREW INTO A TREE OF TEN FEET, BIG ENOUGH FOR BIRDS TO SETTLE AMONGST ITS BRANCHES. EVERYONE KNEW HOW BREAD CHANGED WHEN BAKED WITH LEAVEN, HOW IT MYSTERIOUSLY RAISED OF ITS OWN ACCORD.

ALTHOUGH THESE TWO PARABLES ARE RECORDED IN ONLY THREE VERSES OF SCRIPTURE THEIR MESSAGE STRIKES DEEP AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS ARE VARIED. THE MUSTARD SEED HAS BEEN USED TO DEMONSTRATE MANY DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS. IT HAS SIGNIFIED HOPE AND ASSURANCE Different stages in the kingdom of God because SOME HAVE USED IT TO PROVE THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENT BRANCHES ON THE MUSTARD TREE AND SO ON. IN THIS IT IS LIKE ALL OF JESUS PARABLES. THEY WERE USED TO MAKE A POINT, BY MEANS OF AN OBJECT OR ILLUSTRATION THAT HAD MEANING TO EVERYONE, THEN AND THERE 2 ~~5,000~~ YEARS AGO. AS SUCH THE PARABLES ARE SOMETIMES VERY DIFFICULT FOR US TO COMPREHEND.

ONE THING IS CLEAR HOWEVER, JESUS IS SAYING THAT TO BE IMPORTANT AND MEANINGFUL A THING DOES NOT NECESSARILY HAVE TO BE BIG. SPECIFICALLY HE WAS TALKING TO HIS DISCIPLES ABOUT THEIR NEW FAITH. HE WAS A PEASANT CARPENTER, THEY WERE 12 MEN AMIDST A VAST EMPIRE. AND YET THIS SHOULD NOT BE A POINT OF DESPAIR. LIKE THE MUSTARD SEED--AND THE LEAVEN, THEY HAD WITHIN THEM THE POWER AND THE ENERGY TO PROFOUNDLY INFLUDENCE ALL OF MANKIND. THAT THEY DID.

THIS MORNING I WANT TO LOOK AT THIS DUAL PARABLE AS IT RELATES TO US, IN A TIME AND AGE THAT IS RADICALLY DIFFERENT FROM THE ONE IN WHICH IT WAS UTTERED. REALIZING THAT THE PARABLE HAS MANY IMPLICATIONS I MAKE NO CLAIMS TO COVER THE WHOLE TERRITORY. MY INTERPRETATION IS BUT ONE OUT OF MANY POSSIBILITIES.

WE LIVE IN AN AGE THAT HAS GIVEN RISE TO THE "CULT OF BIGNESS." IN A COUNTRY THAT HAD VAST EXPANSES OF UNSETTLED LAND, A SEEMINGLY INEXAUSTABLE SUPPLY OF NATURAL RESOURCES, AND A SYSTEM THAT ENCOURAGED INVESTMENT, RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY AMERICA HAS BEEN THE NATURAL FERTILE VALLEY FOR BIGNESS AND IMMENSITY. IF THERE IS ANYONE STATEMENT THAT MAY TRULY BE MADE ABOUT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE IT IS THAT WE LIKE THINGS BIG. CONSIDER OUR HOMES AND AUTOMOBILES, OUR INDUSTRY AND EDUCATION SYSTEM AND OUR CHURCHES, THE ACCENT SEEMS TO EVERYWHERE LIE ON BIGNESS, BIGNESS FOR BIGNESS SAKE. IT REMINDS ME OF A CARTOON I ONCE SAW. ONE LITTLE BOY WAS WATCHING HIS LITTLE FRIEND BUSILY MAKE A PILE OF DIRT. NOT A WORD WAS SPOKEN, THE LITTLE FELLOW PILED AND PILED UNTIL THE MOUND WAS HIGHER THAN HIS HEAD. FROM HIS IDLE FRIEND CAME THE PROFOUND COMMENT, "YOU REALLY GOT SOMETHING THERE NOW!" IT WAS ONLY A PILE OF EARTH, BUT IT WAS BIG AND THAT MADE IT IMPORTANT.

WHEN ONE STOPS AND LOOKS AT THE SIZE OF MODERN INDUSTRY HE IS AWE STRUCK. IN 1959 GENERAL MOTORS HAD A NET INCOME OF 873 MILLION. THE OTHER INDUSTRIAL GIANT AM. TELE. AND TELE. TOTALLED 1 BILLION 113 MILLION. THAT'S BIG, AND WE ARE RIGHTLY IMPRESSED. BUT EVEN THESE GIANTS ARE TOTALLY DEPENDENT ON THE LONELY MAN WORKING LATE IN THE LABORATORY

EVEN THEY ARE SOLELY DEPENDENT ON THE IDEAS AND EFFORTS OF SINGLE INDIVIDUALS. HOW LONG WOULD G.M.C. SELL CARS IF IT NEVER HAD A FRESH IDEA. LIKE THE DINOUSOURS, BIG BUSINESS, NEEDS THE VITALITY OF NEWNESS TO SURVIVE LEST THEY BECOME EXTINCT. SO IN THE LONG RUN IT IS NOT BIGNESS FOR BIGNESS SAKE THAT COUNTS: WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT IS THE SMALLNESS OF A MAN'S EFFORT AND WORK: WHAT IS IMPORTANT CAN BE COMPARED TO THE MUSTARD SEED, EVEN IN THE BUSINESS WORLD.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SMALLNESS, OF INDIVIDUAL MEN'S EFFORTS IS DESCRIBED IN A FAS* CINATING BOOK RECENTLY PUBLISHED ENTITLED THE UGLY AMERICAN. DEALING WITH FOREIGN POLICY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS THE BOOK BY NATURE IS A CONTROVERSIAL ONE. IT IS CUTTING IN ITS ANALYSIS OF AMERICAN DIPLOMACY PLUS EXPENSE ACCOUNT. IT BRINGS TO THE SURFACE THE FACT THAT AMERICAN FOREIGN AID IN THE FORM OF WEAPONS, AIR CRAFT, UP TO DATE FARM MACHINERY AND NEW TYPEWRITERS MEANS NOTHING TO THE POPLE OF ASIA. THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR IN WHITE TIE AND TAILS IS A PITIFUL FIGURE BESIDE HIS RUSSIAN COUNTERPART WHO SPEAKS THE LANGUAGE AND KNOWS EVERYTHING ABOUT THE LOCAL HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIOLOGY. THE BOOK REALIZES, AS OUR COUNTRY DOES NOT, THAT SMALL SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT EFFORTS ARE THE ONES THAT COUNT. THAT WHAT IS LASTING AND REAL IS THE SMALLNESS OF ONE MAN'S WORK. THE UGLY AMERICAN, OR RATHER HE BECOMES THE BEAUTIFUL AMERICAN, IS A MAN WHO LIVES IN A NATIVE VILLAGE AND WHO HELPS THE PEOPLE DEVELOP A SYSTEM OF IRRIGATION OUT OF OLD BICYCLES. IN THIS ONE ENDEAVOR MORE GOOD WILL AND LASTING FRIENDSHIP RESULT THAN IN A MILLION M1 RIFLES. AGAIN THE POINT IS RELEVANT. TO BE CRUCIAL A THING NEED NOT BE

BIG AND COLOSSAL.

FROM THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH WE MAY SEE ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF A SMALL, ISOLATED ACT OF ONE MAN. / THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION DID NOT OCCUR BECAUSE THE LOCAL CHURCHMEN GATHERED AROUND THE COUNCIL TABLE TO DECIDE TO PROTEST. THE SPARK THAT IGNITED THE FLAME WAS A LONELY MONK, WHO DIDN'T CARE FOR HIS CHURCH'S PRACTICE AND WHO WANTED ONLY TO SPEAK HIS PIECE.

AND OF COURSE THE MOST IMPORTANT ILLUSTRATION IS JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF. ONE MAN AND HIS 12 FOLLOWERS TALKING TO AT Best A FEW THOUSAND LISTENERS. / IS THIS NOT LIKE THE WOMAN WHO HIDES THE LEAVEN INSIDE THE LOAF AND THEN SEES IT EXPAND AND RAISE. THE MESSAGE OF OUR LORD WAS CRUCIAL AND IMPORTANT, BUT IT DID NOT MAKE THE HEADLINES, NOR WOULD IT TODAY. IT WAS SMALL AND TINY, AND LIKE A SEED IT WAS PLANTED WITH ONLY A CHANCE OF SURVIVAL. / BIGNESS CANNOT BE EQUATED WITH IMPORTANCE. THIS IS THE FIRST MAJOR POINT OF THE PARABLE AND, IF THIS IS ALL WE LEARN FROM IT WE HAVE DONE WELL.

BUT THERE IS MUCH MORE. JESUS WAS TALKING SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN OR THE KINGDOM OF GOD WHEN HE REFERRED TO THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE LEAVEN.

"THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A GRAIN OF JUSTARD SEED WHICH A MAN TOOK AND SOWED IN HIS FEILD: IT IS THE SMALLEST OF ALL SEEDS BUT WHEN IT HAS GROWN IT IS THE GREATEST OF SHRUBS, AND BECOMES A TREE SO THAT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR COME AND MAKE NESTS IN ITS BRANCHE THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE LEAVEN WHICH A WOMEN TOOK AND HID IN THREE MEASURES OF MEAL, TILL IT WAS ALL LEAVENED."

MEN HAVE ALWAYS LOOKED FORWARD TO THE DAY WHEN A NEW AGE WOULD BE USHERED IN. THE ANCIENT JEWS THOUGHT THE MESSIAH WOULD COME IN A CHARIOT OF FIRE BRANDISHING A SWORD, AND WOULD ESTABLISH THE KINGDOM OF GOD BY FORCE. THE DISCIPLES AND WRITERS OF THE GOSPELS FIRMLY FELT THAT THEY, IN THEIR LIFE TIME, WOULD SEE THEIR LORD RETURN TO USHER IN THE NEW AGE. DURING THE DEPRESSION A GROUP OF NEW YORKERS, OF CONSIDERABLE SIZE, HAD DETERMINED THE DAY AND HOUR FOR CHRIST'S RETURN AND THE NEW AGE. THEY SOLD ALL THEIR BELONGINGS AND WAITED ATOP A MOUNTAIN SINGING AND PRAYING. NEEDLESS TO SAY WHEN THE TIME CAME NOTHING HAPPENED. IF YOU ARE SO INCLINED YOU CAN TAKE CERTAIN FIGURES FROM THE SCRIPTURE, ADD THEM UP AND COME TO THE DATE, THE DAY, ON WHICH THE KINGDOM OF GOD WIL BE ESTABLISHEDON EARTH.

TO THIS LINE OF THOUGHT, IN JESUS DAY AND IN OUR OWN, THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED AND THE LEAVEN DEALS A HARSH BLOW. THE SOWER DOES NOT DROP A SEED INTO THE GROUND AND WATCH IT TURN INSTANTANEOUSLY INTO A MUSTARD TREE TO END ALL MUSTARD TREES. TO THE CONTARY IT IS A TEDIOUS PROCESS OF CULTIVATION, CARE AND IMPERCEPTABLE GROWTH, AND IN A SENSE THE TASK IS NEVER DONE. WHEN THE TREE GROWS ITS SEEDS MUST BE PLANTED AND THE PROCESS GOES ON FOREVER. IN BAKING THE WOMAN MUST DISOLVE "STARTER" FROM ANOTHER LOAF AND SO HER PROCESS NEVER FINISHED, IT WAS CONSTANTLY IN MOTION, NOW COMPLETE BUT READY ONLY TO BEGIN AGAIN.

LIKEWISE, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN : IT HAS BEEN PLANTED OR STARTED: IT HAS GROWN TO THE SIZE OF CHRISTENDOM TODAY, AND YET THE PROCESS IS NEVER COMPLETE. IT IS HERE AND NOW AND YET ALWAYS IN THE FUTURE. THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PRESENT IN OUR LIVES, THAT WE MAY PARTICIPATE IN IT. BUT IS IS ALWAYS COMING, ALWAYS IN THE FUTURE. THE TASK IS NEVER WHOLLY COMPLETED, THE KINGDOM IS HERE BUT NEVER FULLY ESTABLISHED.

THE PARABLE ALSO SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO EVERY INDIVIDUAL. IT WAS UTTERED 19 CENTURIES AGO BUT EWEN TODAY IT PIERCES INTO THE LIFE OF EVERY PERSON. FIRSTLY IT TELLS US THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SMALL THINGS, OF OUR WORK AND THE ROLE WE PLAY IN SOCIETY. SECONDLY IT INFORMS US THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS PRESENT AND THAT WE MAY BE ITS CITIZENS. BUT IT ALSO TELLS US MUCH ABOUT OUR FAITH AS IT OPERATES IN OUR LIVES.

HOW OFTEN HAVE WE HEARD THE RE MARK "RELIGION DEOSN'T MEAN ANYTHING, I DON'T GET ANYTHING OUT OF IT." HOW OFTEN DO WE THINK THAT OUR EFFORTS IN OUR CHURCH ARE WASTED, NOTHING EVER HAPPENS? THE PARABLE OF SEEDS AND LEAVEN AFFIRMS FOR OUR BENEFIT THAT SOMETHING IS HAPPENING. BY YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS CHURCH YOU HAVE GIVEN EIVDENCE THAT THE SEED IS THERE, THAT THE ROOTS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD ARE IN YOUR LIFE. GROWTH AND MEANING MAY BE IMPERCEPTIBLE BUT LIKE THE HIDDEN LEAVEN THE ENERGY AND POWER ARE THERE.

FURTHERMORE THE PARABLE REPLIES TO OUR IMPATIENCE BY TELLING US THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEVER A ONCE AND FOR ALL MATTER. WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO EXPECT OUR FAITH TO BRING US BLISS AND HAPPINESS HERE AND NOW. INSTEAD IT GIVES US CITIZENSHIP IN A KINGDOM THAT HAS COME BUT IS EVER COMING.

LASTLY THE STORY OF THE TINY SEED WHICH WAS PLANTED AND GREW INTO A GREAT TREE TELLS US THAT A CERTAIN RESPONSIBILITY IS OURS. THE SEED DOES NOT GROW ALONE IT MUST BE CULTIVATED, WATERED, NURTURED AND PRUNED. THIS IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY. BY THE GRACE OF GOD WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY OF BEING A PART OF HIS KINGDOM, IN US HAS BEEN PLANTED A SEED OF TRUTH A SEED THAT IF PROPERLY TENDED CAN GROW TO A TREE OF GREAT HEIGHT.

→ THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE A MUSTARD SEED, A MUSTARD SEED IS SMALL, AND SO IS MUCH THAT IS IMPORTANT IN LIFE.

→ THE SEED GROWS EVER SO SLOWLY, AND IS CONSTANTLY REPLANTED/SO IT IS WITH GOD'S KINGDOM.

→ THE SEED REQUIRES CARE AND ATTENTION/SO IT IS WITH OUR FAITH.

Amen